



# Montgomery County Council

*From the office of Councilmember Tom Perez*

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**Statement**

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**September 13, 2004**

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Contact: Dan Parr 240-777-7954

## **Regarding Canadian Drug Importation Resolution**

I am very pleased to have been joined here today by a number of my colleagues on the County Council, as well as many members of the Working Group on Health benefits that began the study of this Canadian drug importation proposal almost a year ago. A remarkable amount of due diligence has gone into this effort, and I am very proud of the work this group has done.

I am excited about the fact the teacher's and supporting employee unions, and the school board have included language on Canadian importation in the most recent contracts that were signed this summer. Other unions have followed suit, including county government employees and the Fire and Rescue Service. The language is already in the contracts; they are simply awaiting the imprimatur from the council so they can move full speed ahead.

Once again, Montgomery County is at the forefront of innovation, and we are helping to lead a unique national grassroots movement that will not only save millions of dollars for county taxpayers and county employees, but will fundamentally alter the pricing structure for prescription drugs in the United States. And we are doing it the American way—by introducing competition into the American market.

What do I mean when I say this movement is unique? The movement is unique in the sense that the grassroots are actually local governments, such as Montgomery County and Springfield, MA, who have not been captured by the pharmaceutical lobby, and are working in the public interest. It is not very often that local government actions affect policy on Capitol Hill, but that is precisely what is happening on this issue. Over 700 registered lobbyists worked on behalf of the pharmaceutical industry for the recently enacted Medicare prescription drug bill. That's over one lobbyist per member of Congress. It is not difficult to figure out why meaningful health care reform is impossible on Capitol Hill.

That is why we have to take matters into our own hands in Montgomery County, Springfield and communities across the country. And we are doing just that. Next week, a Council majority will pass the resolution that my colleagues and I introduced earlier this year, and we will move from the study phase to the action and implementation phase. We have addressed the issues of safety, legality and cost effectiveness at great length, and it is time to follow the lead of communities like Springfield, which has the longest running pilot program of Canadian importation in the United States.

In recent weeks, my friends in the chamber of commerce, biotech and pharmacy industries have held a number of events in which they have expressed their strong opposition to this proposal. I have great respect for my colleagues in the biotech and pharmacy communities. They are important pillars of our community. But I have never believed in the “What is good for General Motors is good for America” theory of governance. Sometimes you have to agree to disagree with your friends, and this is one of those times.

We are not here to engage in name calling and finger pointing, although I have been called “no different than Ken Lay and Martha Stewart” by one opponent of this proposal. They want to do name calling, but we are going to do problem solving. They offer speculation but we’ll offer specifics. They offer a farfetched parade of fear factors but we will offer a parade of facts.

The facts are what we are here to talk about today. The facts about drug importation programs, and the facts about prescription drug pricing in the United States. We have two knowledgeable and courageous experts who will address the facts. Michael Albano is the former Mayor of Springfield, Massachusetts, and is the godfather of the grassroots movement among local governments. Springfield has the longest running pilot program in the country. Springfield is a city of 150,000 people, and they are on pace to save \$ 6 million dollars in the upcoming year. Mayor Albano will talk to you about this program, and tell you a bit about its first customer. He will address the facts about safety, cost savings and legality. And by the way, I asked him to bring with him all the Springfielders who have been maimed by these noxious Canadian drugs.

Dr. Peter Rost is Vice President of Marketing for Pfizer. Pfizer is one of the world’s largest pharmaceutical companies. Dr. Rost has been in this business for many years. Let me make one thing clear. He is not here speaking on behalf of Pfizer. That will become abundantly clear once you hear him speak. He is here on behalf of his own conscience. He is an insider in the pharmaceutical industry who believes that reimportation can be done safely, is being done safely across the European Union, and should be done in the United States. He believes that pharmaceutical industry can do good and do well with reimportation, because this is precisely what has happened in Europe. Although he is a high ranking pharmaceutical executive, what he has to say is far different than what you heard from biotech executives in their press conference. Thanks to the courage of people like Mike Albano, Peter Rost, and Greg Lennon of Veragene, LLC, the local biotech executive who has spoken in favor of our resolution, the truth is emerging.

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